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# Semantic Mediations Between Wolof and French in Two Novels of Aminata Sow Fall

Sada Niang  
*University of Victoria*

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*Sada Niang*

## SEMANTIC MEDIATIONS BETWEEN WOLOF AND FRENCH IN TWO NOVELS OF AMINATA SOW FALL

**W**ITHIN THE SENEGALESE literary context, Aminata Sow Fall's legacies are ambiguous. On the one hand, as was the case for all the writers of her generation, Senghor's French-determined modes of language use remained the only recognized and acclaimed model readily available to her. On the other hand, even though shunned by the local establishment, the ideology and modes of linguistic contextualization of an Ousmane Sembène were always in the background. The clash between these two creative and political poles never surfaced in literary terms. But one has a vivid memory of the vigorous, sometimes vitriolic debate that ensued the banning of Sembène's *Ceddo* on grounds that it contravened the presidential decree on the spelling of local Senegalese languages. Whether at some point in her career as a teacher or a cultural worker, Aminata Sow Fall was torn between these two pillars of Senegalese literature in French, may never be ascertained. Ideologically as well as stylistically, however, her practice stands as a direct and uneven bridge between these two literary antagonists.

Her writing, like Ousmane Sembène's, seeks to contextualize the semantic features of the French language. However unlike Sembène or the former Senegalese president, she does not profess atheism but expresses a strong Muslim faith increasingly challenging the laicity of the state. When religion appears in Sow Fall's novels, it does not appeal to the Christian values of universal love unbounded by the color of the other's skin but to Islamic tenets of honesty, love of fellow Muslims, and social decency.

J. Ajala recently argued that Sow Fall's writing, particularly *La grève des bâttu*, qualifies her as a spokesperson of the poor.<sup>1</sup> In some respects, this is true; but it should be mentioned that hers is not a writing that seeks out the underdog, the underprivileged, the dispossessed on an ideological basis. The narrator in *La grève des bâttu* is moved by a deep sense of moral outrage and denounces the officious self-centeredness of civil servants plotting their next career moves against those already marginalized by the post-independence economic structure of the country: the beggars.

Aminata Sow Fall does not seek to conceptualize the plight of these characters and rouse them to unite against the common enemy. With her, ideological parameters such as one finds in Sembène's novels give way to an ad hoc, situational critique of soiled values in modern Wolof society. Her social realism is one rooted in moral values, not in a historical analysis of the political forces facing each other in Senegalese society. Her ideology could at best be described as nationalist, feeding on the "centrality of the Wolof

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model"<sup>2</sup> and seeking to cleanse it from corruption and moral deprivation. Thus, while extolling moral values of "brotherhood" and "human decency" which in the ultimate end may merge with ideals of social justice and social equality, her craft as a writer is more deeply rooted in the language, discursive expressions, and artistic modes of expressions among the Wolof.

As well, Sow Fall's writing is not universal in the sense in which Senghor's sought to be. The issue for her is not one of fusing oneself in the semiotic and semantic limpidity of the French language but rather one of making it carry the substance of one's own idiosyncrasies. Not only are its semantic structures edited and mapped onto the Wolof substance, the structure of the literary form of creation itself is greatly modified.

This paper will concentrate on *L'appel des arènes* and *La grève des bâttu*<sup>3</sup> and define ways in which the narrator of these two novels mediates between the French language, its embedded values, and the Wolof socio-cultural situation these novels depict. We will argue that though grammatical, though actualizing all the formal requirements of the French literary norm, these two texts display semantic and discursive structures intrinsic to the Wolof language. By so doing we will also argue that the opaque meaning generated by the non correspondence between form and content in these two novels is made up for by a semantically tighter context—one in which the implicit semantic components of Wolof expressions and terms are made explicit through dramatization.

In the inventory of the lexical terms of a language, structural lexicology<sup>4</sup> distinguishes between a noun or verb phrase and an idiom. For while the denotational meaning of the former is equal to the total sum of all the semantic features of its various lexical items, the meaning of the latter is totally arbitrary and subject only to the use that its speakers make of it, i.e the pragmatics of the language. The meaning of the English verb phrase "fetch the bucket" is equal to the denotative features of "fetch" added to those of "bucket" as dictated by the linguistic convention. However, the meaning of "kick the bucket" does not refer to the force of a foot applied to a bucket, rather it refers, albeit in a colloquial register, to losing one's life. Knowing the meaning of each of the lexical components of the latter expression does not necessarily entail knowing its global meaning. An idiom therefore is more hermetic, more representative of the arbitrary choices of the speakers of a language than a regular noun phrase. In its monolithic semantic structure, it emphasizes that language functions as the link between members of a group who structure and use it according to their own needs, and in the process develop a semiotic complicity amongst themselves. It is therefore not surprising that in order to suggest the non pertinence of the French language in Africa and the "French" West Indies, Ahmadou Kourouma<sup>5</sup> and recently Patrick Chamoiseau<sup>6</sup> create texts that break the semantic cohesiveness of French idioms.

Aminata S. Fall's preoccupations are not directed towards the ideological significance of the presence of the French language in Africa. The difficulty facing her narrator in *L'appel* is one of attempting to convey in French, the unmotivated and totally arbitrary<sup>7</sup> meaning of Wolof idioms. A literal translation alone would not do, for it would create incomprehensible forms. the solution that has been adopted is one of partial translation and full dramatization.

Midway in the narration of *L'appel*, as the narrator tells of the friendship developing between the young Nalla and his future mentor Maalaw, we find the expression “la case de l’homme.” Its formal features alone would suggest that it refers to a certain identifiable dwelling belonging to a certain identifiable man. Yet if this is so, one would be at a loss to name this particular man, point to this particular hut, or even make sense of the structure of the sentence in which this expression appears: “Raconte moi comment cela s’est passé pour toi, la case de l’homme.”<sup>8</sup> The verb “raconter” implies a story or an event to be told, whereas the form of the expression, “la case de l’homme,” formally signifies a place, a location where one would dwell. As well, one would be equally unable to appreciate the great psychological trauma that descends on the young boy who is forced to acknowledge that no such *experience* has taken place in his life yet. The French noun phrase, “la case de l’homme,” is in fact a literal translation of the Wolof idiom “néégu goor” or “néégu baax.” Its arbitrary semantic features (circumcision, initiation rites, a test of one’s endurance for physical pain) totally missed by its French “equivalent” are creatively contextualized in the sentences and paragraphs of its immediate textual environment:

Pour moi, il n’y a pas eu de case de l’homme. Je voulais bien, mais cela ne s’est pas passé pour moi comme pour les autres garçons. . . J’avais toujours espéré que moi aussi, je danserais mon courage chaque nuit, durant des semaines, pendant que la terre tremblerait sous l’ivresse délirante des tambours de “kassag” et que crépiteraient de mille étincelles l’immense feu de bois dressé sur la place publique. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Thus the exclusive reference to young boys as active co-participants to such an event, “les autres garçons,” and the necessity to give public, nightly showings of one’s bravery suggest that the denotative meaning of “la case de l’homme” could be glossed as a celebration, possibly an initiation rite which young males, Nalla’s age, submit to under close scrutiny of the group. That this whole ceremony takes places at the booming sounds of the drums introduces a traditional spiritual dimension to it. That Maalaw took it for granted that a boy Nalla’s age would have already undergone such a ceremony testifies to the socially compelling nature of such cultural values in this group. “Néégu baax,” one has to admit, is more idiomatic than “néégu goor.” A word-for-word translation of it would yield “la case de bien” or “la case de ce qui est bien.” It denotes the ceremony which turns a young, unaware male adolescent into a fully fledged member of the group, cognizant of its values and his duties. Here, as in the case of Ngugi’s Waiyaiki and Muthoni,<sup>10</sup> the initiation rites that are performed put the youngster’s life into a historical and mythological focus. The youth loses his or her dependency on his or her parents and prepares for group and family responsibilities.

The Wolof citations such as “yaaba” and “kassag” included in the narration of *L'appel* undergo a similar type of contextualization:

Lorsque tu seras “Njully Njaay” je retrouverai la vigueur de mes jambes. Je danserai le “yaaba” et j’entrerai dans la ronde des jeunes vierges qui de leurs voix de miel enchantent les nuits de “kasag.”<sup>11</sup>

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For the first one, all the habitual elements present in situations where the use of this term is probable, are dramatically staged. Firstly, “yaaba” is collocated with the verb “danserai,” which implies music and well-rehearsed steps; then various participants (*jeunes vierges*) and their disposition (*dans la ronde*) are mentioned. Mentioned also is the sound of harmonious voices, and finally the time at which such a dance takes place (*les nuits*). The cursory and somewhat inaccurate translation of the wolof citation, “kassag,” at the bottom of page 76, does not add anything to understanding its meaning that the dramatic contextualization of “yaaba” has not already contributed. By providing it, the narrator only abides by the publishing industry’s rules that the translation of such citations should be given in a note or an appendix; their textual function in this instance varies from minimal to null.

In *La grève des bâttu*, the dramatic contextualization of the Wolof citations bears a distinctive and direct influence on the elaboration of the social and psychological depth of the characters. One will remember that throughout the novel, the beggars, by virtue of their dependence on the rest of society, on the “musleen” for their daily bread, are being used as pawns by the politically ambitious Mour. In this latter character’s eyes, they are a nuisance to the European or North American tourist in search of sights, colors and sun; they are a threat to the public health of the community:

Tu te rends compte [. . .], leur (les mendiants) présence nuit au prestige du pays; c’est une plaie que l’on doit cacher en tout cas dans la Ville. Cette année le nombre des touristes a nettement baissé par rapport à l’année dernière, et il est presque certain que ces gens y sont pour quelque chose. On ne peut tout de même pas les laisser nous envahir, menacer l’hygiène publique et l’économie nationale.<sup>12</sup>

But more importantly for Mour and Kéba, the beggars are the symbol of a shameful condition, shamefully displayed at every traffic light, the graphic image of what they have been fleeing all their lives:

Kéba ne dit pas à Mour Ndiaye ce qu’il ressentait chaque fois qu’un mendiant lui tendait la main. Il ne lui fit pas part de la boule qui l’étranglait . . . ni du remords qu’il éprouvait de se conformer au principe qu’il s’était fait de refuser l’aumône aux mendiants, non par méchanceté ou égoïsme, mais parce qu’il était choqué de voir des êtres humains si pauvres fussent-ils porter atteinte à leur dignité d’une manière aussi honteuse et effrontée.<sup>13</sup>

Part of *La grève*’s aim, then, is to reassert that these “social encumbrances” are in fact the products of a society that has failed to distribute equally whatever wealth it harbors, and that these economically dispossessed peoples serve a religious function for the larger population. Thus, Salla Niang may be a beggar, but her status as a woman and a wife does not change or suffer because of her social condition. In order to restore her the fullness of her human status, the narrator suggests hints of intimate moments with her husband Naaru, by contextualizing two Wolof citations, “cuuraay” and “gongo.” Naaru’s

sensuality is piqued at the thought of “the clicking of her waist beads” and the anticipation of the intimate, overpowering scent of “cuuraay” and “gongo” mixed together: “le tintement (des) perles dans le silence des nuits de savane, à travers l’envoûtante fumée du cuuraay et l’odeur ensorcellante du gongo.”<sup>14</sup> Here as in previous cases, the association of “cuuraay” and gongo respectively with “envoûtante fumée” and “odeur ensorcellante” allows the reader to gloss their denotative meanings as “aphrodisiac products.” In both cases, the narrator turns the Wolof form into the head of a prepositional phrase, modified by an adjective denoting the reaction of a participant to the effects of the “gongo” and the “cuuraay.”

Unlike the instance of “la case de l’homme,” the citation “baay jagal”<sup>15</sup> is only partly contextualized since its referent carries a marginal role in the plot. However it is annotated, and the term “réparateur” given as an equivalent. One may legitimately wonder why, if these two terms are indeed equivalent, the narrator did not select the French term in the first place. After all Madiabel’s presence in the novel is hardly ever noticed; we have no description of him and his apparition is purely anecdotal. As it is, the approximated translation of “baay jagal” combined with the lack of dramatic contextualization for it, curtails even further the social range of the character. For while it is true that “réparateur” is a generic term indicating the exercise of a profession, and that the semantic features of “jagal” overlap with those of “réparer,” it is equally true that the contexts in which the expression “baay jagal” is used, afford it an extension that goes beyond that of the French term “réparateur.” This latter term usually denotes a man endowed with a formal knowledge about machines which he restores to a working state once they break down; a “baay jagal” however, would not usually boast such knowledge even though always willing and sometimes able to fix anything that others bring him. “Réparateur” implies specialization and application of such knowledge, “baay jagal” only implies application. Madiabel repairs broken kitchen utensils but he would equally apply his talents to house building and such like ventures. The resourcefulness of Madiabel, his creativity suffers greatly from the partial translation of “baay jagal” in the absence of any contextualization.

Since Ferdinand de Saussure,<sup>16</sup> the tenuous correspondence of the substance of linguistic signs between two languages has been acknowledged. The conventional and arbitrary nature of any language creates situations where individual “signifiés” in L1 seldom, if ever, correspond to the same signifiés in L2. Translation as indicated by George Mounin,<sup>17</sup> J. Catford<sup>18</sup> is not a matter of finding the exact slots of equal meanings from L1 in L2, but rather one of finding functionally equivalent terms and texts. Even within the same language, Schogt’s 1976 study<sup>19</sup> has amply demonstrated that “synonymous terms” are never completely synonymous. No two terms mean the same thing, or mean in the same way. Here, as is the case between two languages, the correspondence is always partial.

Thus the contextualization of citations, such as we find in Sow Fall’s novels, does not stand in an equal, assertion-like relation to the translation notes at the bottom of pages. Whereas the latter fulfill a reduced metalinguistic function, the former actualize a textual, dramatic function as well as a reduced metalinguistic function. The Wolof citations in *La grève* and *L’appel* only reveal their full meaning through the creative

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contextualization of their various semantic features. The text thus generated displays a high degree of lexical cohesion, corresponding to the semantic field of the Wolof citation. Aminata Sow Fall's contextualization of "la case de l'homme" extends over three pages (76-79) with sentences actualizing the entire conceptual field of the rites of circumcision of young boys in Wolof society:

On les avait rasés. . . . Ils avaient pris un *bain rituel*. . . . en une longue *procession*. . . . ils avaient été conduits dans la *forêt*, par des *sages*, par des *jeunes gens vigoureux* qui avaient déjà passé l'*épreuve*. . . . pour accueillir les *initiés*. . . . *courage*. . . .<sup>20</sup>

. . . vivre la *retraite sacrée*. . . . assez *courageux* pour la *circoncision*. . . . boubou [. . .] des *circoncis*. . . . mon *lingué*. . . . "*des selbés*". . . . *épreuve*. . . . assez *fort* pour y aller. . . .<sup>21</sup>

. . . *salle de l'hôpital*. . . . *boubou des circoncis*. . . . "Njully njaay". . . . "selbé". . . . "lingué". . . .<sup>22</sup>

In contextualizing the term "bassi"<sup>23</sup>, Ousmane Sembène adopts the same type of textual construction. One will also find that Indian writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, as well as "Anglophone" African writers such as Chinua Achebe<sup>24</sup> and Wole Soyinka, adopt similar modes of meaning to avoid "writing like the English" or the French.

Functional linguistic semantics<sup>25</sup> determine the meaning of a lexeme through a combination of "intension" as well as "extension." The former includes all the normal semantic features which characterize it as a "sememe,"<sup>26</sup> while the latter elects its various contexts of use as the extent of its meaning. One cannot, for example, know what features are parts of the sememe "paper" without a knowledge of the linguistic contexts in which it is used.

For a writer using a language created by his/her own society, the lack of correspondence between "intension" of a word and its idiosyncratic "extension" is a function of style. For A. Sow Fall, Ousmane Sembène, and Ahmadou Kourouma, it becomes one of the ways in which notice is given to the reader that the situation usually implicated by the use of the French language does not prevail in their texts. Thus whereas one may find stylistic values to the anomalous extension of French lexical terms in their texts, their primary function is one of presenting the local situation.

Indeed, these contextualizations acquire a stylistic value but we will suggest that their presence is not optional. Rather, their motives are to found in the non-implied relationship that prevails between the French literary norm and the local Wolof, Malinke, or Yoruba situation. Granted, the charge that African literary texts contained too many anthropological information is being read less often in articles and books, but such information as is contained in Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir*, for example, is directly attributable to his use of French and not Malinke or Susu or Bambara or some other African language. The meaning potential of contexts is greater in the novels of A. Sow Fall for the simple reason that the cultural values her nationalist ideology finds expression in are not embedded in the semantic structure of the French language.

Nationalist struggles, as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o indicated,<sup>27</sup> signal a period of revitalization and re-evaluation of the proverbs, sayings, and stories of the community in strife. During the Mau-Mau period, Ngugi maintained, the traditional folklore of the peasants was dusted, reinterpreted and made to serve the new agenda of political and economic liberation. Whether it is in the *Grain of Wheat*<sup>28</sup> or even in *Petals of Blood*,<sup>29</sup> the freedom fighters and their deluded versions some twenty years later relived the proverbs, songs and traditional stories with new vigor. Recently, Modupe Olaogun<sup>30</sup> argued that in the case of Chinua Achebe, the numerous proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* should be perceived as texts whose meaning is not set and sealed by the parameters of traditions once for all but as creative structures helping to conceptualize the particular historical experiences of the group. Lastly, in a study published a decade ago, Bruce King provided a semiotic sketch of nationalist fiction in African and West Indian literature.<sup>31</sup> Its characters are most often not city dwellers but reside in the countryside, the values it seeks to promote are not those of a modern industrialized societies but those generated in and shaped by the "terroir." Finally, such fiction seeks to give literary expression to traditional forms of artistic creation. All of these features appear in the two novels under examination.

Both *L'appel* and *La grève* were written in the 1970s. However, in the first work, the beggars are driven out of the city (la Ville) and choose to stay at its outskirts where migrant workers from the hinterland usually settle. In the second one, a young boy from a professional middle-class family shuns the daily readings of *Le Petit poucet*, and leaves the sanitized world of his parents in order to seek the protection of a man who stands as the epitome of all the traditional values of the land. Thus in both cases, the characters cast themselves against the background of a stifling, aggressive and sterile urban atmosphere. They live off it but do not share its values and eventually reject it. To this extent then, one can argue that *L'appel* and *La grève* actualize a nationalist ideology. However, these two novels are also nationalist in a discursive sense. Both of them, but more so *L'appel*, integrate traditional artistic forms of literary creation such as the "bàkk."

A "bàkk" is a challenge or a response to a verbal bout exchanged between two wrestlers. It usually is defiant but very often seeks to ridicule the opponent by providing the list of all the previous opponents who succumbed to one's iron arms. It is sung and danced by the reciter at the sound of the drumbeat, as he tours the arena under the applause of the audience. The rhythm is shaped by reggae-like, round pulsations which allow the wrestler to mark his steps, singing and dancing all the while. It is an oral performance, not a written text to be read. Its transcription is not unlike that of the words of a song: It loses melody, rhythm and the whole semiosis of body language that accompanies it. Yet there is no doubt that the inclusion of a "bàkk" in *L'appel* manages to convey the existence of a context of culture which normally eludes the implied values in the semantic structure of the French literary norm.

The question that will preoccupy us from now on, is to define the type of cross-language and cross code mediation that takes place with the inclusion of "bàkks" in *L'appel*. What role does the narrator cast for himself/herself? what linguistic and semantic choices does he/she elect?, is it possible to find justifications or at least a rationale for such options?



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Since the text of the “bàkk” exists already in Wolof, we may partly answer the first question by positing that such a role overlaps with that of a professional translator, without being synonymous or equal to it. Succinctly, the task he or she faces is one of exchanging functionally equivalent meanings between the Wolof source text and its French version in the novel. The difficulty is that French boxers, wrestlers, as well as judo and catch practitioners do not, as a rule, engage into Elizabethan-like verbal bravadoes before battling each other. Practically then, an exact total and complete translation is impossible; and even if it were possible, Achebe has warned that such translation would do a disservice to an African writer. For whereas translation is part and parcel of the literary process in Africa, the ultimate aim is one of literary creation. The Wolof text in this case is pretext and pre-text at the same time.

We will argue that even though included in a text pertaining to a body of literature referred to as “Francophone,” “Francophone African,” or bluntly “French African,” the “bàkks” are French as far as the formal features of syntax, morphology and parts of speech are concerned but Wolof as far as their semantic and situational meanings.

Over the last half century or so, systemic linguistics has defined a text as a conglomeration of lexical and grammatical choices bound by a registerial structure and actualizing its meaning in relation to a relevant situation. Thus if, during the course of a car transaction, I produce a text on snow plowing totally unrelated to the actual transaction, this latter discourse, even though grammatical and actualizing some concepts, will be considered meaningless. The situation then gives relevancy, affords immediate pertinence to the formal choices one makes at the linguistic level. At the broader level of culture, a text actualizing specific cultural parameters will be fully meaningful when looked at in relation to the cultural values, facts and attitudes that inform its existence.

The complete translation of the “bàkk” therefore would seek to replace not only its formal features but also its situational features. Yet such is not the case:

Moi Malaw Lô Kor Madjiguène Lô  
 Dans Diaminar où l'on ne dit que lô  
 Le plus fort le plus brave le plus beau  
 Moi Malaw Lô fils de Ndiaga Lô  
 Qui de tous les braves fut héros. . .<sup>32</sup>

We have already mentioned the supra-segmental features such as rhythm. Normal (grammatically and graphically) as it may be, this “bàkk” does not mean in the same way a normal text does. Its denotation, contrary to its graphic nature, becomes completely meaningful only when abstracted from its French implied situation and directly correlated to the Wolof situational features as we attempted to define them at the onset of this section.

The strong, thematic position of “Moi” does certainly suggest a speaker setting himself against everybody else. As well, through the attributive structures of “le plus fort, le plus brave le plus beau,” the reader might infer the defiant self-aggrandizement function of the text. Finally, the name of a location as well as that of one of the parents

of the speaker is also readily available. However, the question of interpreting these cryptic elements remains untouched. What, for example, is the referential value of the first line, what values are presupposed by the second line, to what avails the reference to the speaker's genealogy? These questions arise because the transference from Wolof to French has brought with it implied the denotative and connotative values of its lexical items, at the exclusion of those of the Wolof text.

The undifferentiated use of capital letters in the first line could lead the reader into thinking that "Malaw Lô Kor Madjiguène Lô" actualizes the name of the speaker. In fact, it is a combination of name and traditionally self attributed title. "Kor Madjiguène Lô" is a Wolof prepositional phrase modifying Malaw Lô. "Kor" is equivalent to "beloved husband" or "fiancé of," and glorifies the wife or fiancé as the case may be. By so identifying himself, the wrestler is giving notice that the outcome of the match that is about to start involves both the speaker's honor and that of his family. "Diaminar" is a Wolof noun phrase with a head-noun "jàmm" and a genitive suffix [-i-] meaning the "resting place," "stop," or even "oasis" of the nomadic Moors. The French form "dit" is a literal translation of the Wolof "wax." It suggests that the Lô family is very well known and respected in the village Diaminar. Here, too, the wrestler is extolling the widespread reputation of the family and is vowing to uphold such reputation by promising to defeat his adversary.

A literal translation<sup>33</sup> of this bàkk reveals that the Wolof substance of "dégg" is restricted by its French counterpart "dire"; "dégg" would more totally translate as "where one hears nothing but," where the name Lô "is on everybody's lips." Similarly, the connotative value of "taaru," suggesting grace and almost feminine beauty, is not reflected in its textual counterpart, "beau." The text of the "bàkk" falls short of suggesting not only the presupposed values of a deep sense of honor, but as well the full semantic features of some lexical items. However it remains grammatical. Its form is French and standard, its substance is not. A similar situation exists in relation to a second "bàkk" further in the novel.

The fact that all "bàkks" retranslate almost word for word in Wolof indicates that their French version is not far removed from the Wolof source text. Yet these versions do not actualize a total and complete translation but rather their transliteration. In fact, in the following one, the narrator goes even as far as reproducing part of its Wolof form, leit-motiv-like:

J'ai vécu bien avant l'an passé  
Yaaga naa Yaaga naa Yaaga naa  
J'ai lutté bien avant l'an passé  
Yaaga naa Yaaga naa Yaaga naa  
Pathé Diop oeil de Lynx main de feu  
Je peux ce que personne ne peut  
Yaaga naa Yaaga naa Yaaga naa.<sup>34</sup>

As in the previous case, the booming rhythm of drums accompanying the oral performance of the wrestler is simply not amenable to the scriptural mode of the novel. As well,

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the partial translation of the narrator exchanges formal correspondences between the source and the target language, but not the substance of these forms. However, the discrepancies between form and content of the French version are even greater and more substantial than in the cryptic translation at the bottom of pages.

The present perfect (*passé composé*) of the verb phrases (*j'ai vécu, j'ai lutté*) translate what Pathé Diagne<sup>35</sup> refers to as an aoristic form. Its substance includes both the present and the past of the "*passé composé*" but the future as well. It expresses an action that began in the past, whose consequences are being felt in the present, and will continue to be felt in the near and distant future. By using it, the wrestler is referring to the living presence of his recently and long dead ancestors, to the existence of his present family, and to the no less tangible existence of his future offspring and descendants. Defeating the adversary thus acquires the value of a religious, mythological duty. Failing to carry it through would bring damnation to all of the genealogy of "Pathé Diop oeil de lynx main de feu." The French "*passé composé*" fails to suggest such a dimension.

Aminata Sow Fall, it is usually said and written, writes "Francophone African literature," but the mediations of her narrators, as we have shown, prompt us to ask two questions: first, what does the term "Francophone" refer to in this context? How French is it and what are the parameters of the allophony implied in the term "Francophone"? Do all African writers using French write "Francophone literature" or are there some who write "French literature"? Second, how "African" is Fall's writing? What does the lexeme "African" in African literature entail?<sup>36</sup> Does it pertain to the whole continent, and if so, what aspect of the continent does she express? These are troubling questions, and the list could go on. Without professing to have answers to all of them, I nonetheless wish to offer a few, brief remarks towards their formalization.

I would suggest that "Francophone," as far as the practice of Sow Fall is concerned does not have a monolithic, hegemonic meaning. Rather, it implies difference and the possibility to bend the semantic structures of the French language to give a voice to such a difference. I would also suggest that the French language itself cannot but benefit from this constant editing process; for it moves from an imperial language to a truly universal semiotic code.

As well, the term "African" in "African literature" should be re-examined, for as much as one may find almost common issues in the canonizing of this literature; at the linguistic level one has to recognize that the extent and the nature of contextualization the French literary norm is put through is predicated on the native languages of writers like Sow Fall. The fact that these linguistic African sub texts are not prominent among some writers of the continent does not invalidate the process of contextualization. It could, however, help establish distinct literary practices in the field.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John D. Ajala, "The Beggars' Strike: Aminata Sow Fall as a Spokeswoman of the Underprivileged," *CLA Journal*, 34:2 (December 1990): 137.

<sup>2</sup> M. C. Diop and M. Diouf, *Le Sénégal sous Abdou Diouf* (Paris: Khartala, 1990), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Aminata Sow Fall, *La Grève des Bâttu* (Dakar: Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1979); Aminata Sow Fall, *L'appel des Arènes* (Dakar: Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> John Lyons, *Structural Semantics* (London: OUP); see also Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967)

<sup>5</sup> Ahmadou Kourouma, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (Montréal: Presses de L'Université de Montréal, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chroniques des sept Misères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> i.e. from a non-Wolof point of view.

<sup>8</sup> *L'appel*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, *The River Between* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *L'appel*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Grève*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1916).

<sup>17</sup> George Mounin, *Problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963)

<sup>18</sup> John Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*, (London: OUP, 1965).

<sup>19</sup> Henry G. Schogt, *Sémantique synchronique: synonymie, homonymie, polysémie* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> *L'appel*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>23</sup> Ousmane Sembène, *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* (Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1956). See also *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

<sup>25</sup> Frank Palmer, *Semantics* (London: OUP, 1982); J. R. Firth, *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951* (London: OUP, 1957).

<sup>26</sup> Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolégomène à une théorie du langage*, trans. Una Canger (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1971).

<sup>27</sup> Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, *Homecoming. Essays on African and Caribbean Literature Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972).

<sup>28</sup> Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

<sup>29</sup> Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, *Petals of Blood* (London: Heinemann, 1977).

<sup>30</sup> Modupe Olaogun, "Re-reading *Things Fall Apart*," Simeon W. Chilungu and Sada Niang, eds., *African Continuities / L'Héritage africain* (Toronto: Terebi, 1988), 305-321.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce King, *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980).

<sup>32</sup> *L'appel*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Here is the Wolof version that we propose:

Man Maalaw Lô kor Majigéen Lo  
 Dëkk ci Jam minaar mi nga xam ne Lô rekk ngey dégg  
 Maa fi ëpp dole gën fee neme gënn fee taaru

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Man Maalaw Lo doomu Njaga Lô  
Daan naa fi jambaar yépp

<sup>34</sup> *L'appel*, 82-83.

<sup>35</sup> Pathé Diagne, *Grammaire du Wolof moderne* (Paris: *Présence Africaine*, 1971). See also the more complete and recent works of Amadou Dialo, *Eléments systématiques du Wolof contemporain* (Dakar: CLAD, W22, 1983) and *Structures verbales du Wolof contemporain* (Dakar: CLAD, W18, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> See also Daniel P. Kunene, "African Language Literature: Tragedy and Hope," *Research in African Literature*, 23:1 (Spring 1992): 7-15.